

Service of the Lord's Day

YEAR 'A'

Lent 5

29 March 2020

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT FOR THE FIRST PEOPLE

Before we begin, we would like to acknowledge and pay respect to the traditional owners of the land on which we meet.

As we share our own knowledge, teaching, learning and Christian practice within this house may we also pay respect to the knowledge embedded forever within the Aboriginal Custodianship of Country.

CALL TO WORSHIP

With all my heart, I am waiting, Lord, for you!

I trust your promises.

I wait for you more eagerly

than a soldier on guard duty waits for the dawn.

Yes, I wait more eagerly

than a soldier on guard duty waits for the dawn.

Israel, trust the Lord!

He is always merciful, and he has the power to save you.

Israel, the Lord will save you from all of your sins.

This morning that we gather in God's presence,

is the morning that a person or family who had terrible wakes,

or no shelter to rest

or no one who protects over the night

truly wanted to welcome.

Are we thankful to God for this moment?

Are we truly believing that we are gathering in the presence of God?

As we begin this time to worship God,

we would take responsibility to come into the time and space within God.

Brothers and sisters in Christ,

let us worship God.

ASSEMBLY SONG 1

Behold the Lamb (Stuart Townend) [[Listen](#)]

Verse 1

Behold the Lamb who bears our sins away,
Slain for us: and we remember:
The promise made that all who come in faith
Find forgiveness at the cross.

Refrain

*So we share in this Bread of life,
And we drink of His sacrifice,
As a sign of our bonds of peace
Around the table of the King.*

Verse 2

The body of our Saviour, Jesus Christ,
Torn for you: eat and remember
The wounds that heal, the death that brings us life,
Paid the price to make us one.
So we share in this Bread of life ...

Verse 3

The blood that cleanses every stain of sin,
Shed for you: drink and remember
He drained death's cup that all may enter in
To receive the life of God.
So we share in this Bread of life ...

Verse 4

And so with thankfulness and faith
We rise to respond: and to remember
Our call to follow in the steps of Christ
As His body here on earth.
So we share in this Bread of life ...

Stuart Townend, Keith & Kristyn Getty

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THE PEACE

The peace of the Lord Jesus Christ be always with you.

Also with you.

PRAYER OF THE DAY

Let us pray:

Life giving God,

we set our minds on you this morning.

We ask for your strength

because in us is only weakness and fear.

We hope for your light to shine on us

because only you can give us new life

as you teach us how to live the life given by Your son Jesus Christ.

We thank You for giving us new strength and hope for the journey,

and calling us to be Church

through the love and sacrifice of your Son, Jesus Christ.

Every time we pray in Jesus' name. Amen.

BLESSING YOUR CHILDREN/GRANDCHILDREN

If you are now with your children or grandchildren, please call them by name and offer blessing upon their life and faith journey. Also ask them to pray for you in response to your blessing.

BIBLE READING

Ezekiel 37:1-14 ([Read](#))

REFLECTION ON THE READING

Not death but eternal life

You may know this phrase. It's a French saying, and its English translation would be *the hour between dog and wolf*. It's a reference to those ambiguous hours, for instance, dawn, dusk or twilight. How would you react when you hear this phrase *the hour between dog and wolf*? I believe that it carries so many layers of meaning within it. Let's imagine this: In the fog, you stand opposite to an animal

which looks like a dog. No, it looks like a wolf. It is uneasy to distinguish the animal 'dog' or 'wolf' in the fog. Actually, in your imagination, is it a dog in the fog? Or a wolf in the fog? The French term *the hour between dog and wolf* refers to a specific time of day, when the light is such that no one can distinguish between dog and wolf. It may be the darkening hour or the glooming. The hour between dog and wolf can describe a specific period of life as if you lost direction, life purpose or hope for tomorrow. It is like a critical time to figure out that you are safe or threatened. It is also a crucible time to distinguish dog from wolf and true friendship from evil enemy. I am sure that we know this: in that hour between dog and wolf, we cannot be sure if our eyes deceive, if we truly know what we think or who we really believe in. In that hour between dog and wolf, we would rather be intent to put ourselves in a comfort zone than a place of uncertainty. Of course, it is good to be able to distinguish between the two. However, we've never mastered that. So, in these days, the COVID-19 pandemic has tested our commitment, integrity, and constancy in life being with neighbours and Jesus Christ our Lord. I hope you have a faith in Him this moment.

The Ezekiel passage has a thick and hard imagery so that we cannot miss. A prophet stands in a dry valley. He enters the disturbing site of a mass grave, perhaps even more disturbing because no one bothered to bury these bodies. He seems to be in the hour between dog and wolf. That's not because he is surrounded by dead bodies but because he has no idea in that ambiguous hours. He has seen the valley filled with the dry bones. It is like a picture of woe. The bones are bleached by wind and rain so they are very dry. It is very offensive and even gets on his nerves. There are many 'why' questions for him: Why I am here? Why I see this vision? and Why I prophesize this to them? He is wanting to distinguish whose authority will give a new life back to the dry bones. In that ambiguous hours, the Lord God speaks to him, "Can these bones live?" Yes, it is a staggering question. If Ezekiel was dreaming the vision, it could cause him to wake up. It would have been a nightmare, a horrible bad dream for him in his entire life.

He continued to answer, "God, you know." This answer gives me a mixed feeling: is he stepping back from his position as a prophet? Does he trust God fully? Or willingly he wants to take risk to test God whether the dry bone can live or not? In his answer, we can find that he may revisit the purpose of God on him. Ezekiel was a prophet who speaks God's truthfulness toward to his contemporaries. He received God's commands and voice so that he must speak this to the Israelite

people. In this story, his role is not to give life to the dry bones but to speak God's message toward the people of God who are captured in the territory of the Babylon kingdom. In their Babylonian captivity, there is only one common ground for all Israelite, that is total hopelessness or fear living. Nothing is possible for them. They believed that their captivity is the result of the judgment from God. They just lived day by day in a strange land for surviving like the dry bones.

They would have felt guilty, restless, disappointed or lost because they believed that God had removed them from their own land. What happened to them was that they couldn't define their life purpose in God as well as in the foreign land. They couldn't find purpose to be as the people of God. Instead of helping themselves realize 'God be with us', their purposeless life in Babylon pushes them to feeling that their lives are never good enough. They really wanted to turn back to God, but they didn't know how to. They had gut feeling to seek God' help but they didn't know how to. As Ezekiel is in that hour between dog and wolf, the Israelite people are also in the hour between dog and wolf. It is a crucible moment for them. Perhaps we have been in that hour between dog and wolf in recent days.

When we hear this story, we know it is a story of resurrection and hope so we strongly hold the 'Can these bones live?' part. But as we follow the prophet in the reading, we come across God who speaks to His people who did not listen to! God's message in Ezekiel's prophecy is this: not repentance and forgiveness but failure, stubborn sinfulness and ultimately death and decay. I can imagine that this crucible moment for Ezekiel is very challenging as well as for the people of Israel. Despite his own faithfulness, he is faced once more with the reality and end result of human sinfulness.

Prophet Ezekiel just continues to speak what the Lord God commands to him:

“Behold,
I will open your graves
and raise you from your graves,
O my people.

And I will put my Spirit within you,
and you shall live,
and I will place you in your own land.

Then you shall know that I am the Lord;
I have spoken, and I will do it,
declares the Lord.” (vv 12-14, ESV)

I would encourage you to keep a little faith in you if you were in that hour of dog and wolf or if you had someone near you who are in that hour in life. There will be an end in this troubled time affected by the virus. This story of life-giving God shows us God’s way and it strengthens us for the rest of the journey. Jesus calls us to follow him, but the journey to the cross is daunting. Our journey to the way of Cross maybe always in that hour between dog and wolf. But whatever circumstances we have, we would say, ‘the one thing we want is God’.

We have been following Jesus well. We know that suffering, sorrow and even death is very cruel in life, but they cannot make us down. Jesus reminds us that it is not about us in calling Lazarus from the grave, saying “unbind him, and let him go.” Jesus makes Lazarus’ path and even his sisters and villagers’ path clear so that they can see God’s work in them and for them. It is God who will strengthen us to follow Jesus. It is God who will bring resurrection where there was only death and decay. It is God who can breathe new life into our lives today. God looks after us as we look to Him.

Amen.

PRAYERS OF THE PEOPLE

Pray for family, friends, neighbours, church communities including Hunters Hill Congregational Church, the countries who are suffering from COVID-19 pandemic, including Albania, Slovenia, Serbia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia, Montenegro, North Macedonia.

THE LORD’S PRAYER

Our Father in heaven,
hallowed be your name,
your kingdom come,
your will be done,
on earth as in heaven.
Give us today our daily bread.

Forgive us our sins,
as we forgive those
who sin against us.

Save us from the time of trial
and deliver us from evil.

For the kingdom, the power,
and the glory are yours
now and forever.

Amen.

BENEDICTION

The blessing of God almighty,
the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit,
be upon you and remain with you always.

Amen.

OFFERING

Please make offering through Direct Debit or Bank Deposit if you are able. The offering will be used for the congregation's mission and ministry.

Many thanks.